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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

SECRETARY OF THE NEW YORK STATE CONFERENCE

OF

UNITARIAN CHURCHES

FOR 1889.

READ AT THE FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING, HELD IN THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH, NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 20, 1889.

NEW YORK STATE CONFERENCE OF UNITARIAN CHURCHES,
104 East 20th Street, New York.
1889.

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FORM OF BEQUEST.

I hereby give and bequeath to the Trustees of the New York State Conference of Unitarian Churches, the sum of

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to be used for religious, educational and charitable purposes.

The above is the simple form requisite in making a legacy for the furtherance of our work.

Any further information which may be desired can be obtained by applying to the Secretary at his office, 104 East 20th Street, New York.

ANNUAL REPORT.

The year that has passed since the last Annual report was rendered has been a year of increased missionary activity, of enlarging opportunity, and brightening outlook. One of the most encouraging features of the year is found in the fact that nearly every church in our Conference is manifesting a deeper interest in our work and an increasing sense of responsibility for its share in promoting it. This means that in the future, the resources of our churches, both in money and in missionary workers, will be more largely utilized and more efficiently directed to the end of promoting the spread of our faith and the extension of our churches. That out of this is to come, not only largely increased missionary results, but also increased life, growth, and power in the existing churches themselves, is as certain as anything can be. In engaging in this common work, our churches are withdrawing from that state of isolation in which they have hitherto stood too much apart, and are coming together in closer fellowship. In this closer contact the strength of all flows to each ; new life is kindled ; enthusiasm is generated ; and, as their united energies come to be directed to the accomplishment of one common purpose, a new spirit takes possession of them and quickens and strengthens all their activities. This new spirit, then, that is pervading our churches and filling them with new zeal for the spread of our Liberal Christianity, is one of the most hopeful and encouraging signs that greets us as we enter upon the work of a new year.

But the past year has been fruitful in other respects than these. It has given further opportunity for practical, experimental study of the field ; and so has brought fuller and more accurate knowledge of the conditions which we have to deal with, of the possibilities of church extension which it contains, and what means and methods must be adopted in order to ensure the best and largest results. This is not the least important of the gains of the year ; for next in importance to having a work to do, is that accurate knowledge of the work itself and how to adjust suitable means to the end in view, which must guide us in the doing of the work.

That our field differs in some respects with reference to the conditions of church extension from other parts of the country might, perhaps, be inferred from the fact that in this middle region of the country so little comparatively has hitherto been accomplished in the way of church extension ; but just why and how it differs is not, I think, clearly and generally understood. It would, perhaps, be well at this point to state the reasons for this difference, but as I have so recently set forth these reasons in my report to the National Conference (which has since been printed in the *Christian Register*), I will not take the time to repeat them here. It is sufficient to say that these conditions are such as to necessitate making our work very largely, in its first stages, at least, an educational and preparatory work.

But, fortunately, there are some places within our Conference to which this general rule does not apply—a few exceptional places, where the conditions are more favorable to the *immediate* work of Church extension than in most places throughout the middle States. These exceptional places are of two kinds—large manufacturing centres like Pittsburgh, and the attractive and rapidly growing residence towns in the neighborhood of New York, chiefly on the Jersey side, like Plainfield, Montclair and the Oranges. Into these places there has come,

within the last few years, a considerable percentage of New England people. Here we find groups of Unitarians who are calling upon us to come and help them to organize churches of our faith. In Canada, also, we find a number of places where the conditions are equally favorable to Church extension. There, English immigration has brought in a good percentage of English Unitarians. Add to this a large Scotch population, which is now beginning to enjoy the freedom and the blessings of a wholesome revolt against Scotch Presbyterianism, and we have the conditions which make the extension of our churches in Canada, and especially in several towns in Ontario, not only feasible, but comparatively easy.

Obviously it is the part of wisdom to select for our first efforts in Church extension those places where our investment of money and effort will bring the largest returns; in other words, the places where, because of the favorable conditions, we run little or no risk of failure in establishing churches which shall have a good prospect of becoming speedily self-supporting. Every church thus established makes it easier to establish others in the neighborhood, and so helps on the work of preparation in those places where the conditions are less favorable, because every success inspires confidence and becomes the parent of other successes.

It was in pursuance of this policy that Hamilton, Ontario, and Plainfield, N. J., were selected as the first and most favorable places to concentrate our efforts in during the year now closing. The result has been, in every respect, most gratifying.

At Hamilton, a city of 40,000 inhabitants, situated at the head of Lake Ontario, there has been for several years a group of isolated Unitarians. Several of them, invited by friends in Toronto, attended the meetings of our Conference held in the latter city in October of last year. After listening there to the stirring and inspiring addresses which made that one of the memorable meet-

ings of our Conference, these persons returned home burning with missionary zeal and determined to have a church of the faith they loved and lived by, in their own noble city. They immediately began to prepare the way by a generous distribution of our literature, a work in which they were zealously aided by our Post-Office Mission workers in Toronto. By the generosity of the American Unitarian Association, and the zeal of our friends in Toronto, I was enabled to arrange in the latter city, last winter, a course of twelve special services, conducted by some of our most eminent preachers. One of the conditions of this arrangement was that the pastor of our Toronto Church, Rev. A. T. Bowser, should spend a part of the Sundays on which his pulpit was thus occupied, in helping on this missionary work in Hamilton. His part of the arrangement was fulfilled; and, as the way had been carefully prepared, the result was just what was expected from sending that incarnate gospel of Unitarianism among those who were eager for his word. Written invitations were sent out, and seventy-five persons, among them some of the most prominent citizens of Hamilton, responded at the first meeting, although the Sunday was a very stormy one. We were aided in this movement from the start, by Mr. James C. Hodgins, then a recent accession from the Presbyterian Church. The work prospered from the beginning, and in May I was called upon to organize the new church. Mr. Hodgins, who was immediately called to the pastorate, accepted and entered at once upon his work. The church began with a good constituency, and has gone on growing ever since. Under the administration of its devoted and brilliant young pastor, a prosperous future is before it.

At Plainfield, N. J., one of the suburban towns before mentioned, we found a considerable group of Unitarians, and others, who, not knowing themselves as Unitarians, were yet yearning for just the word and fellowship we

had to offer them. The preparations for this new movement were carefully worked up ; preliminary meetings for consultation were held ; a local committee of arrangements, composed of some of the first citizens of the place, was appointed ; and, all things being in readiness, the first public meeting was held May 12th, last. On July 10th, we organized the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield under circumstances which gave assurance of steady growth in power and usefulness. In the middle of September, by a piece of rare good fortune, I succeeded in getting Rev. William P. Tilden to take charge of the new parish ; and, under his administration, it has gone on growing in numbers and efficiency, and steadily surpassing our expectations. A Sunday school has been organized with about twenty pupils, and an adult class of about an equal number. By the generosity of Hon. Job Male, the society has been provided very pleasant and comfortable quarters in a spacious dwelling house, centrally located, where, by the removal of partitions, an audience room capable of seating 150 persons has been obtained and attractively furnished. Mr. Tilden has very appropriately christened it the " Home Church."

In January last, work was begun in Poughkeepsie, by Rev. F. O. Eggleston, who volunteered to undertake there the task of gathering the liberal elements of the city, in the hope that he could unite them in a church of our fellowship. These elements consisted of the fragments of the so-called Abbott movement, which, for want of proper management, went to pieces five or six years ago ; the better portion of a suspended Universalist society ; and that everywhere growing class of liberal-minded people, some of them unattached, some of them misplaced in the Orthodox churches, but all of them out of sympathy with the thoughts and aims of the existing churches. To unite these diverse elements is, under the most favorable circumstances, a difficult task ; and in this instance was rendered doubly difficult by reason of

unsuspected local feuds and jealousies, which had their origin partly in social divisions, partly in petty differences growing out of past failures; but all of which reappeared and constituted a serious hindrance to the work the moment the attempt was made to bring these people together. These causes have prevented that hearty response which was hoped for, but now that the real state of the case is disclosed to us, we are better able to provide for its requirements, and shall make a further and determined effort to solve the problem of how to overcome these obstacles to success.

The experiment made at Tarrytown has not developed sufficient strength to warrant us in pressing for an organization there at present.

At Freeville, near Ithaca, the Universalists gathered a small society which, when it came to organize, desired a broader basis than that which was proposed to them, and so they are turning to us for fellowship. Rev. John W. Day has preached there several times and will continue for the present, with the assistance of one of his laymen, to supply the pulpit. The movement has in it the promise of some growth.

Last Spring, by the invitation of a few liberal people living there, I visited De Ruyter, in Madison county, this State, and preached one Sunday. Subsequently, I arranged with Rev. H. D. Maxson, one of our ministers whose parents reside at De Ruyter, to preach there two Sundays. A good deal of interest was shown, but as the community is a small one, and the prospect of self-support, if a society were organized, a somewhat distant one, it seemed best to make haste slowly, and more thoroughly prepare the way by fostering the growth of Unitarian sentiment in the community through the ministry of the Post Office mission. This is now being conducted there in a very efficient and systematic way by Mrs. Cutter, of Buffalo, and Miss Hawley, of Syracuse. A correspondent writes that marked progress in the growth

of Unitarian sentiment is being made through this dissemination of our literature.

I turn now to two new undertakings which call for mention. At Pittsburgh, Pa., the only city of its size, I believe, in the United States in which we had no Unitarian Church, we began work in September. The Rev. Dr. James G. Townsend, than whom none could be found better fitted for the undertaking, is giving himself with all his might and enthusiasm to the work. In canvassing the city, we found here a good group of Unitarian families who are eager and enthusiastic for a church of our faith. Previous to beginning, careful preparations were made, and the work there has proceeded with steadily growing interest and enthusiasm to the present time. The attendance at the services is steadily increasing, the movement is becoming more and more widely known, and is already taking a strong hold upon many who have never before heard the gospel of Unitarianism preached. The permanent organization of the Society is now completed ; a full board of officers elected ; and, as soon as the necessary legal formalities can be attended to in accordance with the Pennsylvania statutes, the Church will be incorporated.

The prevailing type of Orthodoxy in Pittsburgh is very narrow ; and the prejudice against us in this stronghold of Presbyterianism is very bitter ; but, including Allegheny City, we have a population of three hundred thousand to draw from, and feel sure of success. Concerning the opportunity and the outlook there, you will hear further and more fully from Dr. Townsend who is to address you this morning.

At the Oranges, which are among the most popular suburban towns in this neighborhood, we have a constituency of Unitarian families eager to have a Unitarian Church established in their midst. The work of preparation is now in progress, and services will be begun as soon as arrangements can be completed.

In this connection, I wish again to call attention to what I regard as the pressing need of new societies in some of our large and rapidly growing cities, in each of which we are now represented by only one Church. In these places distances are becoming too great for one church to serve our whole constituency. This is mission work which the existing church in each of these large cities ought at once to initiate, not only for the sake of retaining those who belong with us, while at the same time extending the reach of our influence to those who would be benefited by a broader, more inspiring faith than that offered in most of the so-called evangelical churches; but also for the sake of furnishing a channel of usefulness for the young people of our churches who, if their services could thus be utilized to this end, would become ten times more interested in and devoted to the welfare of the churches where they are now largely uninterested and unemployed members. If each of our churches in the larger cities like Buffalo, Syracuse, and Toronto, would undertake this work, they would, I am confident, find themselves not only greatly reinforced by having another society at their side, but also reinvigorated by the quickening of interest and activity among their own membership.

Since our last Annual meeting, our ministerial force has been increased and greatly strengthened by the new accessions to the Conference. Four pastorates, which were then vacant, have since been filled, as follows: The First Church, in Brooklyn, by Rev. H. Price Collier; the Reformed Christian Church, of Trenton, by Rev. Edward Foster Temple; The First Unitarian Church, of Troy, by Rev. Joseph Waite; and the First Unitarian Church, of Rochester, by Rev. William C. Gannett.

The two new pastorates that have been created during the year, namely, at Hamilton, Ontario, and Plainfield, N. J., are now both filled, the former by Rev. James C. Hodgins, and the latter—temporarily—by Rev. W. P.

Tilden. To these should be added the name of Rev. Dr. James G. Townsend, in charge of the new society at Pittsburgh, Pa., making an increase of seven to our pastoral force.

Against this gain, we note with great regret, the loss by resignation—made necessary by ill-health—of Rev. Pitt Dillingham of the pastorate of our church in Buffalo. This is a great loss, not only to the church over which Mr. Dillingham was so recently settled, but also to the whole Conference, which, in his withdrawal from our ranks, is deprived of a most congenial, faithful, scholarly and efficient worker. I am sure I but voice the prayer of all, when I add that our heartiest wishes for his complete restoration to health go with him.

In this connection it is fitting that mention should be made of another loss that we have suffered in the sudden death at Ithaca, N. Y., on the 11th inst., of Rev. James S. Bush. Though a recent accession to our ministry and our Conference, yet we are none the less pained at the loss of one whose fine scholarship, refined tastes, high character, sweet spirit and genial presence commanded our fullest esteem, and gave rise to the expectation of years of delightful and profitable comradeship as well as useful service in our liberal ministry which he had come so heartily to espouse.

Of the general condition of our churches you will learn more fully from the reports that are to follow. Of the older churches it is sufficient here to say that on the whole they were never more actively engaged in their appropriate work, never more useful, never more full of life and zeal than now. Of the churches receiving the fostering aid of the American Unitarian Association, I am happy in being able to say that they all show signs of growth and increasing strength and usefulness, thus justifying the policy by which they are being helped into a condition of self-support.

It is proper, in this connection, to express the satisfac-

tion which we all feel in the recent action of the American Unitarian Association in granting, on satisfactory terms, the sum of $15,000 to our Society in Harlem. In thus coming to the rescue at a critical moment in its history, the Association has not only insured the success of the Harlem undertaking, but in doing so, has put the churches of this city and neighborhood under obligations to show their appreciation of its generosity by at once raising the additional twelve thousand dollars necessary to complete the $40,000 required to be raised here. This action of the Association comes to our churches as a challenge to a like generosity, which they cannot fail to respond to promptly, without a loss of self-respect. It is incredible that they shall suffer themselves to be put to shame in this matter.

Our efforts to systematize and enlarge our Post-Office mission work during the year have met with a good degree of success, and yet there remains a vast deal more to be done in this direction before we shall have improved to the utmost our opportunity. The chance for extension in this department of our work is almost unlimited, and it is a matter in which all who have any means of getting at the names of people of liberal and enquiring minds anywhere within the limits of the Conference, can aid us by sending the names of all such persons to me, so that I may add them to our lists and then forward them to our Post-Office mission secretaries to be, by them, supplied with our literature. I again invite the widest possible co-operation in this work.

It now remains to call your attention to some suggestions having reference to the enlargement of our usefulness. I have frequently been asked if our Conference could not be induced to enlarge its boundaries a little, so as to take in the churches that are near us on the south and west. Only last week, Rev. Joseph May, of Philadelphia, wrote me concerning this as follows: "Why," he says, "won't your Conference take us all in?

We are nearer to you than even Albany and Troy. I think we should unite. Cannot this matter be talked over among you at your meeting?"

This request, coming spontaneously from several different sources, calls for serious consideration on our part. Here are a few churches just over our present borders, too few and scattered to have a conference by themselves; and even if they could, it would be better to unite our forces than to keep them divided. Without increasing the cost, or adding to our machinery, more efficient work could be done in any part of our territory because we should have a wider co-operation and larger resources to work with. By geographical location these churches must have their local conference connection with us, or have none at all. It would help them and help us, to have co-operation and fellowship in our missionary work for the middle States. The question then is, "Shall we promote our mutual interests by making this the New York *and* Middle States Conference, and so include all these churches that want to come with us?" I put this question before you as it has been put to me, in the hope that it will be accorded the consideration which a proposition of this character, coming from the quarter I have referred to, deserves.

The next step towards increasing our efficiency and enlarging our usefulness to which I wish to call your attention, is the movement now on foot to establish in New York, in connection with the new parish house of All Souls Church, a Unitarian headquarters, where, besides affording a place for keeping on sale the publications of the American Unitarian Association, our various denominational organizations will be provided with suitable rooms for their committee and board meetings. It is hoped that this will be made a centre for our denominational work, and a convenient and attractive meeting place, not only for our workers in and about New York, but also for ministers and others visiting the

city. That such a general Unitarian headquarters for the Middle States would prove of great value, there can be no doubt. Will you take such action as may be needed to help consummate this object?

One word in conclusion. As we face the future we have every reason to be filled with hope, for, as I said in the beginning, we face a brightening prospect. Our work is steadily growing in every direction. But because our work is an enlarging one, we need increased resources to work with. There is a point in the formative period of nearly every new society when, before any aid can be secured from the American Unitarian Association, a helping hand is needed. One or two hundred dollars given at the right time may count for a great deal in promoting the success of a new movement. Our Conference ought to be able to render this aid. It lies with the churches represented here, by the generous exercise of their privilege of giving, to render it possible for the Conference to do this. Will they do it? If they will, the year to come will bring a record of still greater progress than that of the year now drawing to its close.

Respectfully submitted,

D. W. Morehouse,
Secretary.

New York, Nov. 20th, 1889.

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